



Ruthie Bolton

Biography

Ruthie Bolton (a pseudonym) was born near Charleston, South Carolina in 1961. Her father was unknown to her, and her mother was only thirteen when she gave birth to her. Her grandfather, Clovis Fleetwood (a pseudonym), gave her the nickname Gal. Ruthie Bolton/Gal is today a grown woman who has carried with her the painful memory of a childhood lived under the tyrannical rule of her grandfather, or “Daddy,” as she grew to know him, and with the absence of her mother. The scars left by her horrific childhood have lightened with the creation of her autobiography, *Gal: A True Life*. Seemingly, Ruthie’s story would have been impossible to tell without the help of Josephine Humphreys, a novelist from Charleston. Humphreys painstakingly took the childhood scenes of Ruthie’s past from oration and scripted them into *Gal: A True Life*.

The union of Bolton and Humphreys came by chance; the connection was made by one of Bolton’s co-workers, the janitor of the building where Humphreys worked. It took but one telephone call for Humphreys to see talented storytelling and the tragic tale that Bolton had to offer. Humphreys said, “When I first heard her voice over the phone, (the voice of) a young woman asking me if I would take a look at her book right away I said yes, for a reason I knew was odd: I wanted to hear the voice again. I loved its sound, bright and quick, edged with a hint of mystery, a strong voice. But I had no idea how strong it would prove to be.” Humphreys transcribed Bolton’s oral stories, filling in the blanks but nothing more. Humphreys’ primary contribution was typing the words as Bolton spoke. “I acted as a secretary more than anything else,” notes Humphreys. The 300-page manuscript was sent to Humphreys’ agent and within weeks it was sold. Today, Bolton and Humphreys share an agent.



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1961
- * Her autobiography, *Gal: A True Life*, chronicles her difficult childhood

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Biography continued

As a child, “I never had anyone touch me except to beat me,” writes Bolton in *Gal: A True Life*. Her grandmother and grandfather, whom she called Mommy and Daddy, raised Bolton in the Hungry Neck section of Charleston. By her mid-teens Bolton had lost her mother to an enraged lover who tied her to a bed and set her afire with kerosene. Bolton had also witnessed the bloody beatings inflicted upon her grandmother by her grandfather. The beatings eventually led to the death of her grandmother. Neither Bolton nor her aunts, or sisters, as she called them, were excluded from the beatings as long as they lived under Daddy’s roof. The abuse and neglect she suffered drove Bolton to steal and to take drugs as a way out. The horrible experiences that Bolton endured also led her to develop a stutter.

Bolton’s only work, *Gal: A True Life*, is a straightforward look into a poor, abused African-American girl growing up in the south in the sixties. Her story is of anguish and inspiration, despair and hope, but mostly of survival. Her survival depended on her learning to love and trust. This would not have been possible without Ray Bolton, her second husband, and his family. They gave her unconditional love and taught her to trust again.

Time magazine said, “*Gal* is not about racism, feminism or victimization. The book enters the darkness of a ‘no-love’ family without self-pity or bitterness and moves steadily toward the light. The sense of authentic experience eagerly seized is sharp on every page.” Today, Bolton stands in this light that she hungered for her entire life. She wrote *Gal* to begin the process of healing from her memories and to put the past behind her. She is now happily married, with five children, and surrounded with love. Bolton said, “the writing of this book, it was like I was free.” Immediately after publication, the vivid autobiography *Gal* became a bestseller and earned favorable reviews. R.Z. Sheppard of Time compared Bolton’s style to that of Saul Bellow’s, stating that “she even has something of Bellow’s broad moral overview.” Further positive reviews were written in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.



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Selected Bibliography

Works by the Author

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